



Rural Career Counseling Coordinators Program

State Fiscal Year 2019

Annual Report to the Legislature

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Introduction

Minnesota’s Strategic Plan for workforce development is built on stakeholder and service delivery approaches that require partnerships at the state, regional, and local levels. The Rural Career Counseling Coordinators Program (RC3) is part of the plan’s priority strategies for talent development and resource alignment to ensure and grow Minnesota’s competitive edge. This report:

- Summarizes Minnesota’s Rural Career Counseling Coordinators Program 2019.
- Highlights stakeholder engagement efforts to connect regional educational pipelines with in-demand career pathways that meet the current and future workforce needs of area businesses.
- Provides aggregate data on stakeholder engagement and the statewide total numbers served.

Minnesota’s Strategic Workforce Development Plan

Vision

The vision of Minnesota’s 2016-2020 Strategic Workforce Plan is to have a healthy economy where all Minnesotans have – or are on a path to – meaningful employment and a family sustaining wage, and where all employers are able to fill jobs in demand.

Goals

As revised in 2018, the goals of Minnesota’s WIOA plan are to:

1. Reduce educational, skills training and employment disparities based on race, disability, disconnected youth or gender.
2. Build employer-led industry sector partnerships that expand the talent pipeline to be inclusive of gender, race and disability to meet industry demands for a skilled workforce.

Rural Career Counseling Coordinators Program

Each workforce development region located outside the metropolitan area has a Rural Career Counseling Coordinator position. This position is charged with improving coordination and communication of workforce development programs and services with administering agencies. The RC3 professionals have advanced local and regional workforce development program and service delivery knowledge; they apply that expertise with customer outreach and engagement and by making recommendations for continuous improvement or new workforce initiatives.

Customers and Services

- **Business** – understand workforce development needs of new, existing and prospective businesses.

- **Job Seekers** – connect to secondary and higher education, employers, stakeholders and partners.
- **Career Seekers** – provide counseling, training and work experience opportunities.
- **Workforce Development System Stakeholders and Partners** – share best practices and collaboration to enable state-level coordination among workforce development programs and administering agencies.

In addition, career counseling coordinators are expected to collect and assess information about all workforce development programs and services offered in their assigned area, to promote these programs, and to make recommendations to the Commissioner of the Department of Employment and Economic Development about ways to improve career counseling coordination and workforce development.

Regional Planning and Rural Career Counseling Coordinators

Minnesota's approach to regional planning is based on the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements and the state's experience working in partnership on regional economies with the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and the Harvard School of Business.

Minnesota has six workforce development regions. Factors such as geographical size, population, migration patterns and the workforce market were considered in identifying regions. Minnesota's six workforce regions align with its sixteen Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) and its federal Economic Development Areas. Each region developed a four-year plan to showcase its distinctive regional economies, unique workforce development strategies, and tactics and projected outcomes.

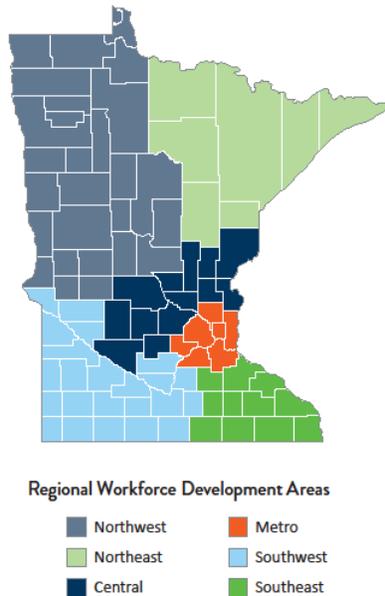
Rural Career Counseling Coordinators have a key role in their region's work plan to:

- Connect employers with the diverse talent pools in their region and improve employee retention.
- Implement regional approaches to connect service providers and community members to their region's racial, ethnic and disability communities to collaborate on workforce development needs and opportunities.
- Build talent pipeline partnerships to connect secondary and post-secondary students and out-of-school and disconnected youth with hands on experiences in pre-apprenticeships, work-based learning, dual enrollment and equity programs, skills camps, career pathways and occupations in-demand. Intentional talent retention and exposure to a wide variety of career pathway post-secondary options are vital to growing regional economies.
- Collaborate with local and regional economic development boards, employers and governmental entities to strategically align key messages, identify and address workforce and skills needs, and retain current and attract new businesses and industries.

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Map – Rural Career Counseling Coordinators Program



Regions with a Rural Career Counseling Coordinator position and their Local Workforce Development Areas are:

- **Northwest Region**
 - Northwest Private Industry Council, Inc.
 - Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program, Inc.
- **Northeast Region**
 - Duluth Workforce Development
 - Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training
- **Central Region**
 - Career Solutions
 - Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, Inc.
- **Southwest Region**
 - Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, Inc.
 - South Central Workforce Council
- **Southeast Region**
 - Winona County
 - Workforce Development, Inc.

Each region submitted a 2019 Rural Career Counseling Coordinator report to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). DEED has consolidated the submitted reports for this annual program report to the Legislature.

The next five (5) sections of this report highlight the work of each region's Rural Career Counseling Coordinator.

Northwest Region – Rural Career Counseling Coordinator

Regional Approach

Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc., the Northwest Private Industry Council, Systems Partners, and Business continue to support the Minnesota Rural Career Counseling Coordination through the established Regional Workforce Alliance. The Northwest Regional Workforce Alliance, established in 2016 through WIOA Regional Planning, helps braid together our efforts to serve a broad array of stakeholders in our Rural Region.

The established Regional Workforce Alliance membership convenes quarterly to review, oversee and evaluate the area's Rural Career Counseling Coordination (RC3) efforts. Building on the alignment efforts under the prior year's actions, additional emphasis has been placed on diversity, inclusion and equity to help solve the critical workforce shortage. Our continued efforts help connect job seekers with Career Pathways and businesses.

Starting in 2019, the Region Workforce Alliance has taken an additional step in serving both career seekers and businesses by developing a committee structure to help build foundational components necessary for future success of Rural Career Counseling Coordination. Committee structure support includes: **Business Led Sector Strategies, Community Engagement, Client Centered Design, Policy/Systems and Funding**. These committees have helped develop a more cohesive approach supporting our work since the inception of the Rural Career Counseling Coordination Legislation enacted in 2016.

Best Practices:

- Engaging LWDB's, Systems Partners, Businesses and Equity Partners in quarterly Regional Workforce Alliance informational gatherings.
- Highlighting a data-driven approach to identify regional Workforce Development and Career Pathway needs.
- Engaging LWDB's, Systems Partners and Businesses in a committee structure designed to support common Career Pathway Methodologies as defined by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.
- Building on the invaluable knowledge of members of the (2) LWDB's in development of strategies to serve Career Pathways in our Rural Region.

Connecting System Partners

Connecting Regional Businesses and Systems Partners continued into the 2019 Program Year with a series of (6) Regional Summits designed to validate research started in 2018.

In support of those efforts are leaders from Local Workforce Development Boards, Economic Development Commissions, CAP Agencies, Initiative Foundations, Adult Basic Education Consortiums, Perkins Consortiums, Chambers of Commerce, and Higher Education. These partners continue to explore business and career seeker

needs in the areas of: Workforce Recruitment and Retention, Childcare, Housing, Transportation, Mental Health and Diversity.

Additionally, Rural Career Counseling Coordination efforts include continued interaction with Systems Partners to include Adult Basic Education in the area of Adult Transitions Plans, and also interaction with Carl Perkins Consortia for development of synergies in support of WIOA and Carl Perkins V Legislation.

Best Practices:

- Developing partnerships with DEED and System Partners to break down barriers and to explore additional synergies in support of Students, Older Workers, Under-Employed and Under-Represented Workers, Residents, Caregivers, and Efficiencies in the Workforce Development Environment.
- Continued Alignment of Rural Career Counselor Coordination efforts with State Adult Basic Education Transition Plans.
- Began alignment of Rural Career Counselor Coordination efforts with the Federal WIOA and Carl Perkins V Legislation to eliminate duplicate strategies and tactics.
- Development of synergies with the DEED Workforce Strategy Consultant Staffing helps tie LWDB Business Services and Career Pathway into with DEED Business Services.

Career Services – Outreach and Marketing

Through interaction with DEED and Systems Partners in 2019, we began additional outreach and marketing and developing career seeker tools.

Building on the recommendations from K-12 Partners and Businesses, the Career Pathway Info-Graphics that were developed in 2018, were re-designed in 2019 and placed on LWDB websites for access by all youth and adult career seekers. This has provided a user-friendly interface and a more efficient and easily accessible venue for career seekers to obtain Career Pathway information. Additional social media interactions were implemented to attract additional web traffic to the Career and College Readiness section of the LWDB website.

Specifically for K-12 career planning, a new student engagement system building on the successful RMCEP Career Ed Venture programming was developed to help students in rural schools who may not have access to career information. This is an abbreviated version called “Career Navigator” which includes sections on Occupations in Demand, Career Pathways, development of a Personal Career Learning Plan, and opportunities for Experiential Learning. This enhanced career planning product is being offered to select schools in 2019/2020 to align with the DEED Higher Education and Career Advising Program (HECAP).

In the area of Adult Career Pathways and support, RMCEP and NWPIC have offered staff training in the development in foundational concepts and career counseling in workforce development. In 2019, 13 staff earned the Global Career Development Facilitator Certificate.

Best Practices

- Expanded LWDB Website capability to display Career and College Readiness - Career Pathway Infographics. These are available for business recruitment and job seeker career exploration.

- Created an efficient K-12 outreach model called “Career Navigator” to fill gaps in existing K-12 Career and College Readiness preparation and delivery systems. This supports a flexible career advising methodology for career planning, internships and work-based learning models.
- Supported staff development in attaining foundational skills in Career Planning and Career Pathways through the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF).
- Designed a process improvement in job seeker soft skills by developing and offering an Employability Skills Certificate to job seekers in CareerForce locations throughout the 26-county region.

Achieving Equity

Through WIOA Regional Planning and Rural Career Counselor Coordination, multiple avenues for development of services supporting diverse populations have been planned and implemented.

In early June of 2019, Regional Partners came together to develop a Community of Interest called the Community Workforce Inclusion Council. This group of systems partners includes Local Workforce Development Boards, Economic Development Commissions, CAP Agencies, Initiative Foundations, Adult Basic Education Consortiums, Perkins Consortiums, Chambers of Commerce, Higher Educations United Way Agencies, Equity Partners and Business Partners.

In Spring 2019, the Community Workforce Inclusion Council partnered with the Diversity Council of Rochester to offer a training opportunity for business called “Equity Logic for Business.”

Recent activity stemming from the Community Workforce Inclusion Council includes the development of the Inclusive Workforce Employer Designation. Partners in the Northwest Region plan to offer the Inclusive Workforce Employer Designation to businesses in early winter of 2020.

RMCEP Completed a 3rd successful year in the development of Disability Employment Initiatives and Ticket-To-Work programming.

In Partnership with DEED, the West Central Initiative Foundation and Regional Economic Development Agencies, we established an effective interaction with minority owned business in the community of Pelican Rapids.

Future work in the area of diversity, inclusion, and partnerships with Equity Partners will connect “Welcoming Communities” to “Welcoming Workplaces” for a continuum of support for populations experiencing in-equities in employment outcomes.

Best Practices

- Developed a Community of Interest Consortium in the Moorhead/Fargo Region call the Community Workforce Inclusion Council. Efforts include validation of barriers to workforce participation of the New Americans and Refugee Populations.
- Launching new and innovative practices supporting businesses establish more effective workforce recruitment and retention strategies through the design and development of the “Inclusive Workforce Employer Designation” - (I-WE).
- Combining Disability Employment Initiatives with Ticket to Work Programming and Career Pathways creates a streamline system for engagement of populations with disabilities.

- Launching a Minority Owned Small Business Support Consortium in a Rural Community. Northeast Region
– Rural Career Counseling Coordinator

Regional Approach

The Rural Career Counseling Coordinator (RC3) collaborates with the region's two Local Workforce Development Boards, several career pathway committees from each board, different Chambers of Commerce from across the region, private sector businesses, and public institutions. The RC3 has identified the workforce needs and challenges of businesses in key sectors, including the construction trades and healthcare. Regional entities continued to offer seminars – the Workforce Solutions Series – to convene and focus on the topics of recruiting new employees from different populations, including those with disabilities.

Best Practices

- Knowing and understanding the region's key industry sectors and their career pathways.
- Connecting sector businesses to populations of job seekers they haven't utilized to their full potential.
- Linking non-profit organizations to regional workforce development services and partnerships.

Connecting System Partners

During 2019, the Rural Career Counseling Coordinator focused on several projects. These projects helped in training incumbent workers, career awareness for young people, and career exploration for job seekers. The RC3 continues to enhance and increase the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training and Advanced Minnesota partnership. Advanced Minnesota is a customized training collaborative consisting of the area's five Minnesota State Community Colleges.

One project was to expand the area's incumbent worker training program. This program partners with a business to help fund skills training for full-time employees. Reskilling and upskilling incumbent workers meets industry demands for new skills, higher overall skill levels and advanced skills and improves a business's financial results. This program was expanded this year to cover the entire region, and now both the City of Duluth and NEMOJT have an incumbent worker training program.

Another project was braiding various funding streams and partners to produce regional career exploration events for healthcare, and expand events for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers and the forestry, construction trades and manufacturing sectors. The career exploration events resulted in increased outreach to area employers and high schools to showcase the area's career pathways and in-demand occupations.

Best Practices

- Participating in Career Fairs and an incumbent worker training programs.
- Engaging with the North Star Expo - Future Forests Stewards, Engineering Mentoring Night, STEM Showcase, Iron Range Science and Engineering Festival (IRSEF).

- Providing student career awareness and industry exposure by setting up business tours.

Career Services – Outreach and Marketing

The RC3 has led the Skilled Trades Committee, a sub-committee of the Northeast Workforce Development Board. This committee is comprised of employers, educators, trade union representatives, public sector advocates, and state agencies. They have created and are delivering an awareness campaign for the region's skilled trades. This campaign, named **218 Trades**, focused on reaching out to four distinct school audiences – (1) high school students, (2) teachers and guidance counselors, (3) parents and family members, and (4) groups under-represented in the trades (primarily women and people of color). This campaign has a webpage www.218Trades.com, which is the central point of the campaign, as well as a YouTube channel, accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and is very active on social media, trying to educate job seekers and the people who may influence them on what a career in the skilled trades would look like. We have created a set of presentations to take into high school classrooms and are partnering with employers and union representatives to deliver this information in an engaging manner. This campaign has been so successful there is interest in the region to do the same things for the healthcare industry.

Best Practices

- Multi-facet approach to build career awareness around the skilled trades for several different audiences.
- Replicating and expanding the skilled trades career awareness campaign beginning with the healthcare business sector, potentially expanding out into other business sectors as well.

Achieving Equity

The RC3 continues to be a part of the Equity Committee and is part of the planning team for a diversity and inclusion training program for employers scheduled for the spring of 2020. The RC3 and the local Career Technical Educations (CTE) representatives worked on the gender disparities for various business sectors such as how to enroll more girls in construction and STEM classes and more boys in nursing classes.

Best Practices

- Being a member of a Local Workforce Development Area's Diversity and Equity Committee.
- Conducting equity and diversity training for local businesses.
- Partnering with local business leaders including the region's various chambers of commerce and other engaged groups to produce equity and diversity training for business.

Central Region – Rural Career Counseling Coordinator

Regional Approach

Regional collaboration of our two local workforce development boards, businesses, employer organizations, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, and other community stakeholders supplement workforce data in Region 3. This approach results in informed validation of our region’s skill and talent needs (both current and projected) and promotes enhanced stakeholder collaboration.

Best Practices

- Development of the “Untapped Workforce” series of employer education events
- Targeted promotion of hiring events to “untapped populations” of focus following each “Untapped Workforce” employer event.
- Engagement in regional planning, including presentations at all regional planning board meetings.
- Creation and distribution of, and awareness campaign for, career pathway infographics featuring high-opportunity occupations.
- Completion of a survey of secondary schools throughout Region 3, to gauge extent of their career exploration and career and technical education activities
- Provision of incumbent worker training, on-the-job training, and other resources to employers to help them connect with, onboard, and upskill workers.

Connecting System Partners

The Rural Career Counseling Coordinators, local workforce development boards, Initiative Foundation, St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce, and other community partners worked together to launch the “Untapped Workforce” series of employer education events. Each event was followed with hiring events in the region and these were promoted to each event’s population of focus.

Region 3’s partners, including employer partners, connect through coordinated job fairs, panel discussions, business tours, youth-focused programming, and other projects that highlight and promote high-opportunity career pathways. This includes a full spectrum of postsecondary training, workplace learning, and customized incumbent worker training. Partner education on the effective use of current labor market information is also provided. The development of a strategic plan for the healthcare sector has reinvigorated local sector strategies and has re-engaged community stakeholders. The Rural Career Counseling Coordinators have in-depth knowledge of regional resources and regularly refer youth, adults, and businesses to appropriate and resources in a timely fashion.

Best Practices

- Active involvement in the hands-on career exploration event held in February 2019, titled “EPIC” (Explore Potential Interests & Careers). This event drew 2,200 high school students to the St. Cloud Technical and Community College Campus, where they had the opportunity to interact with dozens of employers and

had the opportunity to try some of the work those employers do. The planning team included local colleges, economic and workforce development professionals, and businesses representing six of our region's key industries. This event will be repeated in February 2020 and is expected to continue on an annual basis.

- Active involvement in the hands-on career exploration event, titled "IGNITE Your Future" held on Ridgewater College's Hutchinson campus in October 2019. This event drew 1,200 high school students and was patterned after the St. Cloud area EPIC event. The planning committee for IGNITE Your Future included k-12 and post-secondary educators, local chambers of commerce, WIOA partners, the United Way of McLeod County, regional employers, and many more.
- Development of a strategic plan for our Healthcare Sector Coalition Central Minnesota (formerly Healthcare Taskforce) and the establishment of work committees.

Career Services – Outreach and Marketing

The Rural Career Counseling Coordinators frequently connect with local employers by facilitating or partnering to facilitate human resource and business professional groups, job fairs, local and often monthly hiring events, and incumbent worker training projects. The Rural Career Counseling Coordinators connect key workforce partners and stakeholders, share workforce development information, and grow and maintain an employer network by delivering local presentations and participating on various committees to address workforce-related issues (e.g. housing, childcare, transportation).

Best Practices

- Promotion of incumbent worker training to Region 3 employers. Lending incumbent worker training expertise to employment and training partners from other regions.
- Ensuring availability of job search resources and workshop curriculum to Somali jobseekers.
- Participation on a national taskforce created to advise the development of online disability awareness training modules, which will be made available to American Job Center staff nationwide (1 of only 31 chosen to participate, nationally).
- Introduction of career information at local student- and parent-centered events (e.g. career planning events, parent teacher conferences, high school class registrations, and other school presentations). Information has been shared at all age levels; elementary, middle school/junior high and high school.
- Expansion of CareerONE with Healthcare, Construction/ Manufacturing for 2019 and adding Business Tech tracks as well for 2020.
- 33 Electrolux clients earned their Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) Apprenticeship. The IMT Apprenticeship, which is nationally recognized program, is registered with Apprenticeship Minnesota. The program trains front-line manufacturing production workers in skills manufacturers look for in diverse settings such as food processing, foundries, plastics and bio-medical production. The 18-month or 3,000-hour apprenticeship trained workers in a hybrid competency-based format with 2,736 hours on-the-job learning and 264 hours related classroom instruction delivered on-site with a live instructor via mediated-telepresence. Courses include Safety Awareness, Manufacturing Processes, Quality Practices, Maintenance Awareness, Technical Math, Print Reading in addition to soft-skills training, OSHA 10 and

First Aid/CPR certifications. Participants earn a Journeyman Card in Manufacturing. With one additional course, Introduction to Computers, participants earn a 16-credit Production Technologies Certificate.

Achieving Equity

The Rural Career Counseling Coordinators are active on the Region 3 planning team. They are aware of the area's career and technical education offerings, World's Best Workforce legislation, and action plans. They have employed a collaborative approach to supplement and support guidance counselors in an effort to mitigate the well-known guidance counselor deficit. The Rural Career Counseling Career Coordinators have expertise with and/or connections to job resources for new Americans, people with disabilities, and those with offender histories, and the "Untapped Workforce" series, with which they have been highly-involved, directly correlates to help reduce disparities for these populations.

Best Practices

- Use of the PACER Center's consultation services to gain cultural and disability-related expertise.
- Increase in the diversity of agency staff and board membership.
- Providing employer "consultations" on accommodating cultural differences in the workplace.
- Creation of additional labor market information materials. These materials can be customized to highlight local high-opportunity occupations, career pathways, median wages, and job growth projections. Employment specialists/career navigators, jobseekers, students, and businesses have found these highly visual materials to be helpful and user-friendly starting points for career exploration and planning.

Recommendations

- Create a space on the CareerForce platform to share best practices so employment and training providers can discover additional opportunities to build capacity, take part in professional development activities, and more effectively deliver services. Southwest Region – Rural Career Counseling Coordinator

Regional Approach

This region's Rural Career Counseling Coordinator (RC3) is expanding partnerships with local school districts, developing career materials, providing career services, connecting career education and business, distributing career information and services widely and extensively, addressing disparities, and growing stakeholder collaboration across the region. Parents, teachers, and mentors are the primary source of career information for students.

Best Practices

- Increasing high school students' exposure to occupations in demand through school districts and career services partnerships that increase career awareness and exploration.
- Growing career awareness, exploration, and work-based learning opportunities for students and parents through events, stakeholders, outreach and updated in-demand occupations materials.

Recommendations

- Supporting the region’s promising collaborations focused on career exploration, awareness, and work-based learning opportunities.
- Educating families, teachers, and creating community awareness regarding real and local career pathway options available, especially the work and learn opportunities (Career Pathways, On-the-Job Training, Internships, Apprenticeship, etc.).

Connecting System Partners

The Rural Career Counseling Coordinator is an intermediary to connect job seekers, schools, students, parents, employers, education institutions, and other stakeholders to each other and to the workforce development system. This is accomplished by one-on-one and group meetings, ongoing communications, presentations, and resource sharing. The RC3’s work in career services and work-based learning opportunities has positively impacted the region’s career pathway work and benefited the future workforce and local employers. Work-Based Learning is a significant component to this region’s Career Academies / Career Pathway programming.

Best Practices

- Greater Twin Cities United Way Career Academies / Career Pathway programming to address disparities in education and employment by launching in the most diverse secondary schools in the region to earn high school and college credits and gain marketable skills in high demand occupations.
- Expanding career pathways” and career work based learning opportunities, internships, work experience, job shadows, employer guest speakers, industry tours, and apprenticeships.
- Providing staff to support students and employers who are engaged in work-based learning opportunities. Real-world applications and work experiences in combination with key training provide paths to educational and career advancement building the local talent pipeline to help employers meet their needs for a skilled workforce.
- Provide professional development and sharing of best practices with schools, community-based organizations, employers, staff and more to create awareness of the resources available in the region to support students and job seekers in their career development. Identify ways in which local resources can be leveraged and aligned.

Recommendations

- Create awareness through the promotion of our local Workforce Development Boards leading CareerForce, Minnesota’s unified workforce system, with a focus on WIOA Region 5’s workforce development system. Promoting CareerForceMN.com and CareerForce location services available to employers, job-seekers, schools, and more.
- A dedicated role is necessary to track outreach and partnering, ensuring there is little duplication of services and greater synergy regionally, distribution of responsibilities, establishing partnership agreements, assuring accountability, and holding implementers to agreed accountability measures.

Career Services – Outreach and Marketing

The Rural Career Counseling Coordinator conducted an asset mapping gap analysis of the career advising and career pathway coursework. Throughout the region, after interviews with nearly half of the secondary schools, it was found that small rural schools have very limited, if any, staff time dedicated to career advising. In larger schools with a full time guidance counselor, only about 35% of their time is dedicated to career advising. The majority of schools visited indicated they were not sharing current labor market information with students, due to lack of time to research and package the information for students. Providing career services in the region's school districts is critical. Our region has lower high school graduation rates, 9.6% of individuals 25 years or older do not have a high school diploma. That is nearly twice the Metro area of 6.7%. This is especially true for our region's largest population of color (Hispanic/ Latinos), 49% versus 35% in the Metro do not have a diploma. *Poverty* rates are also higher in our rural region. Minnesota Governor Dayton selected Opportunity Zones in 15 of our 23 counties (65%) due to the poverty rates. With the lowest wages in the state, there is a great need for additional support to not only learn about high paying, in-demand nontraditional careers but to become employed in them.

Best Practices

- Providing career services including career exploration, career awareness, and work-based learning opportunities which align with the use of local labor market information to students, parents, teachers, coaches, job-seekers, school counselors, mentors, and more through career advisory services, creating and distributing career information, and presentations.
- Launching a regional labor market campaign “Know Before You Go” that includes median wage range by education level, post-secondary cost estimates and in-demand jobs. This initiative has expanded to industry specific infographics for health care, manufacturing, information technology, agriculture, transportation, construction and business. And, the infographics are now available in Spanish.
- Local studies indicate that parents and family have a strong influence on career decisions being made by young people. In the summer of 2019, WIOA Region 5 launched a social media campaign through Facebook and Instagram to inform youth and parents of high demand occupations. A significant increase of followers were established, and we intend to further this momentum gained with our social media presence creating awareness around workforce development.

Recommendations

- Expanding the use of the new career advisory materials to provide an interactive environment for classrooms, community education, workforce development, or learning environments geared towards career development.
- Funding the updating, high-quality printing and requested quantities of the career advisory materials.
- Continue the translation of the career advisory materials to reflect our inclusiveness.

Achieving Equity

The Southwest Region's Leadership Team created goals and strategies to increase their capacity to provide equitable services to reduce educational, skills training and employment disparities based on race, disability,

disconnected youth or gender to provide greater opportunity for all Minnesotans. The region is home to the 2nd and 6th most diverse counties in the state (Nobles and Watonwan), both of which have the highest percentage of the states’ Hispanic/Latino population (27% and 23%). *Employers* in the region are challenged to hire employees with the skills needed as shown by our region’s high Job Vacancy rate (5.7%). Tight labor markets and a scarcity of workers are now recognized as the region’s most significant barrier to future economic growth. It is evident that a more diverse workforce in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, and disability status, is a vital source of workers that employers need to succeed and it is imperative that we equip all populations with the necessary skills to gain employment in high-pay, in-demand occupations. (DEED & American Community Survey).

The goal of MN WIOA Region 5 is to create innovative strategies for our local employers to meet industry demands for a skilled workforce. Locally this is being done through our employment and training services offering a continuum of integrated opportunities and support to obtain academic credit, college credit, industry recognized credentials, marketable skills, related OJT/WE, and employment in high growth, high-demand occupations. Our Career Pathway programming model addresses any barriers individuals have to obtain the skills necessary. Participants do not have to choose between a low paying job or going to school. With these services individuals have the opportunity to earn wages to meet their basic needs **WHILE** earning industry recognized credentials they need to advance in their careers. MN WIOA Region 5 is creating opportunities for individuals to **work and learn** advanced skills leading to higher wages while meeting industry demands for a skilled workforce.

Best Practices

- Belonging to, active membership, in and utilization of the professional development available through the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards (MAWB), Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN), Youth Intervention Programs Association (YIPA), Southern Minnesota Professional Development Network (LWDA professional development network for staff), local Chambers, and many more.
- Increasing diversity on boards, committees and staff. Results include new Local Workforce Development Board members and Diversity and Equity Committees and Career Pathway Partnership Committees with membership from organizations representing populations experiencing disparities.
- Career Pathway Programming (On-Ramp, Pathways to Prosperity, Youth at Work): Our region was also an early innovator/implementer of Career Pathways programs and received Promising Practice Awards by MAWB for the last three years in a row!

Recommendations

- Continuing the work with employers on CareerForce services available and the benefits of hiring targeted populations.
- Intentionally engaging workforce development boards, staff, partners and employers in training/professional development opportunities on diversity and cultural competency/responsiveness.
- Provide a cooperative dynamic to employers, to increase the opportunities available for an “earn and learn” model. Employers are more likely to participate if they are offered support and guidance around the systems in which we do our daily work.

Southeast Region – Rural Career Counseling Coordinator

Regional Approach

Region Six continues to work across the ten counties of WDA8 and with Winona County, under WDA10, by identifying institutions, organizations, and businesses with whom to partner for Career Pathways development.

Best Practice

As a result of the changing workforce, WDI has restructured its board committee structure into Strategy Subcommittees and Equity Taskforces. The Strategy Subcommittees are Employer Engagement (co-led by an RC3), Emerging Workforce (Youth), and Career Pathways, which represent Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Services & Trades. The Equity Taskforces consist of MaxAbility Employment (persons with disabilities), Salute Southern MN Veterans Network, and the Previously Incarcerated Individual Taskforce (co-led by an RC3). The structure was created to engage employers, board members, community members, and individual career seekers in discussion and planning surrounding career pathways.

Connecting System Partners

Best Practice

WDI staff have implemented strategies to improve outreach to youth throughout the region. Our Youth Career Planners have established connections with several high schools in rural Southeast Minnesota through group presentations. These presentations, which generally run one class period (45 minutes) in length, focus on topics in the areas of work-readiness and employment. Subjects have included essential employment skills, workplace behavior, resume writing, job search techniques, labor market information, interview skills, and financial literacy. Presentations are given to career-exploration classes, as well as to groups at school-sponsored career fairs. This strategy has also provided an inroad for our Youth Career Planners to meet with these youth on an individual basis, as the students will often seek career-focused advice that is tailored toward their specific needs.

WDI and MnDOT expanded on the initial \$100,000 grant that had been focused on creating short-term trainings to bring an awareness of, and access to, careers in vertical construction as well as highway heavy. Two additional four-week trainings have been offered and a fifth one will be offered in May. WDI teaches the first two weeks of Essential Skills training, which includes resumes, cover letters, interviewing skills, and math as it relates to construction. Students earn OSHA 30 certifications, a Flagger's card, and CPR, First Aid, and AED certifications under the tutelage of union trainers. MnDOT has shared additional monies, allowing Riverland Community College – Austin to join the partnership and expand the training to include a one semester CDL training focused on increasing the number of women and minorities in the laborer's field who possess their Commercial Driver's License.

In November, 2019 WDI secured a Women's Economic Security Act (WESA) grant. The goal of the grant is to train women for high-wage, high-demand, nontraditional jobs in MN. The grant focuses on women of color over the age of 18, girls of color, ages 16 – 18, women over the age of 50, and women who fall into the low-income

category. This grant joins the three Pathways to Prosperity grants that focus on creating short-term trainings for people with barriers to employment for in-demand careers that pay a living wage:

1. Careers in the Trades. Partners include Carpenter’s, Laborer’s, Cement Masons, Plasterers, and Shophands, and Laborer’s Unions to provide four- or six-week trainings. Emphasis is placed on Essential Skills, attainment of certifications, and employment with union contractors leading to apprenticeships for women, minorities, and persons with a criminal background.

2. Public Sector Careers. Partners include Hawthorne Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC). Customers in the on-ramp level will receive developmental training/education to build foundational skills such as the Northstar Digital Literacy certification to meet employer’s technology needs. Students will be able to earn up to nine RCTC core curriculum credits and eight developmental credits which can be transferred into at least five separate career pathways with a variety of degree and employment options.

3. Manufacturing/Welding. Partners of WDI include Hiawatha Valley Adult Education, Minnesota State College Southeast, Hiawatha Valley SHRM, and the Red Wing Area Manufacturing Association. This training prepares incarcerated and recently released individuals from Goodhue, Wabasha, Winona, and Houston counties for employment in manufacturing/welding positions. Training includes Manufacturing 101, OSHA 10, and Essential Soft Skills which lead to one college credit, two certificates, and one certification.

Career Services – Outreach and Marketing Strategy and Tactics

All of the trainings above utilize Career Planners from each of our WDI offices to recruit, vet, and enroll students. Each program also employs navigators who are there to support students as they encounter barriers to success and provide the wrap around services necessary to make this attempt at education and employment successful.

Best Practice

Because of the continued low unemployment rate in Region 6, currently 3.2% as of December, 2019 WDI is revitalizing the Employer and Outreach Service Specialist position across the region. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act calls for an increased focus on employer services through intentional partnerships to build our future workforce and develop skills and training based on industry demand. The Employer Outreach Service Specialist will facilitate listening events across the region with employers, community partners, and local elected officials. A consistent message as well as an inventory list of trainings available from WDI will be shared with employers. One of the goals is to develop a plan that reduces disparities and increases equity. Another goal is to promote our Best Places to Work initiative and include more businesses from Winona and Winona County.

RC3’s across the state continue to work together to expand the sectors covered by the career pathways marketing materials. This year the RC3’s will move from Labor Market Information (LMI), individualized for each region, to state-wide LMI. If RC3’s were to receive additional funding for outreach and marketing we, in Region Six, would put that money toward translating the flyers into the three most prevalent languages in our region as well as upgrade our current website and social media.

Achieving Equity

Working toward equity is a high priority of WDI practices. Our programs are structured for inclusion of people with disabilities, veterans, minorities, women and with a criminal background. All WDI training programs are designed to reach people with barriers to employment, and our outreach is focused on inclusion of under-represented populations. We, as RC3s, embrace best practices, build relationships with community partners and employers, and reach those who can best benefit from the services offered by Workforce Development, Inc.

Recommendations

Continue to provide funding and support for RC3 work. The network of RC3's across the state allows us to share best practices and combine efforts such as providing labor market information, developing career pathways, and tackling workforce shortage issues for a wide variety of customers. This state-wide RC3 approach allows for a great deal of coordination and collaboration throughout the region as well as around the state, bringing rural providers together and giving a resource that has benefited employers, job seekers, and communities alike. Real work is being done in rural Minnesota that was not being done before the RC3 position was created. The needs of career seekers and employers in rural Minnesota are different than those in metropolitan areas. The RC3 position is one of the best ways to keep the focus on the needs of the people in rural MN, address those needs, and expand the talent pipeline to meet the industry demands for a skilled workforce while being inclusive of gender, race, and other people with barriers to employment, including persons with disabilities.

Data Table – Rural Career Counseling Coordinators

The following table summarizes the outreach and engagement activities of the state’s Rural Career Counseling Coordinators. In 2018, Minnesota’s Rural Career Counseling Coordinators standardized the criteria for stakeholder group classification, engagement methods summaries and data collection processes.

Stakeholder Group	Engagement Methods Summary	Total Number Served in 2019
Business	Business tours; Career Pathways and Economic Development meetings; Career Exploration events; Job Fairs; Internships.	5,852
Job Seekers	Layoff, Job Search Workshop and Career Exploration presentations; Job Fairs; Business tours.	10,720
K-12 Institutions	Career Exploration Summer Camps; Mock interviews in high schools; Career Exploration presentations; Local Careers.	334
Post-Secondary Institutions	Disability Employment Initiative programming; College fairs; Integrated instruction for career pathways programming.	155
Adult Basic Education	Two-way referrals; LEARN & EARN programs; providing services in local jails; How to enroll in skills training - local and regional in-demand occupations.	32
Community Based Organizations	Collaborative business engagement efforts; Cross-referrals; Engaging diverse communities; Partners in regional planning; Accessing new talent for regional workforce and in-demand careers / jobs.	102
Economic Development	Participation on regional comprehensive economic development committees; Collaboration with local and regional economic development; Business recruitment presentations and tours; Regional talent development to meet business and industry current and future workforce needs.	99
Other	Regional Initiative Foundations; United Way; New Americans Project; Tribal Governance and Tribal Workforce Steering Committees; Public Libraries; Community Action Agencies.	88